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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000845

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: POLICE ARREST TOP POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS

REF: KATHMANDU 813

1. On May 3, Nepal's Armed Police Force (APF) arrested Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) Chairman Madhav Nepal and Nepali Congress (NC) President G.P. Koirala. Both political leaders were arrested from their homes at approximately 1230 and 1430, respectively, and are being held at APF headquarters. The top leaders of the other three agitating political parties, the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, the Peasant's and Worker's Party and People's Front Nepal, NC General Secretary Sushil Koirala, and most of the Nepali Congress Central Committee were also arrested. Staff at Nepali Congress headquarters also reported that roughly 1,000 demonstrators were arrested from the street protests and are being held at the National Stadium. All five leaders of the political parties were scheduled to address a mass political gathering at 1530 today in Kathmandu. As of 1700, none had been released from custody.

2. Comment. Although the reasons behind the arrests remain unclear, it appears that the Government of Nepal (GON) preemptively seized these leaders to forestall the mass political gathering scheduled for this afternoon that was expected to attract thousands of participants. Curtailing the political parties' freedom of expression on the eve of the Nepal Development Forum, when all eyes are focused on the government's record on human rights and good governance, seems sadly miscalculated, particularly since Nepal's donors had agreed to participate despite the political parties' requests for a delay (Reftel). Although the party leaders will likely be released shortly after nightfall, the GON may come under additional criticism at the NDF for this action. The arrests also are likely to provide the agitating parties with another complaints against the monarchy, which they can try to use to breathe new vitality into their daily demonstrations. End Comment.
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